

פרשת עקב

"ועתה מה ה' אלקיך שאל מעמך כי אם ליראה אתה אלקיך..."

"And now Israel, what does Hashem your G-d ask from you but to revere Hashem your G-d..."

Our Rabbis learn from this Pasuk that we are obligated to recite a minimum of 100 Berachot every day. The Gemarah says in the name of Rabbi Meir: "חייב אדם לברך מאה ברכות בכל יום שנאמר ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלקיך שואל מעמך". A person is obligated to say 100 Berachot every day as it is written; "what does Hashem ask from you". Rashi explains that we should read it "מאה" (one hundred) - instead of "מה" (what). So the Pasuk now reads: "מאה ה' אלקיך שואל מעמך" - "it is one hundred (daily blessings) that Hashem asks from you.

The Midrash writes that in the times of David Hamelech, there was a plague in which 100 Jews were dying every day. David Hamelech in his divine spirit instituted the recitation of 100 Berachot every day, in order to stop the deaths of 100 Jews. Our Rabbis have continued this practice by inserting 100 Berachot into our daily schedule (praying, eating, etc.).

The question is asked; what was done before David Hamelech instituted the 100 Berachot? Could it be that the Jews in his time were *not* making Berachot?! This does not seem likely! What exactly did David Hamelech change when he instituted the 100 Berachot?

The explanation is that the Jews had been making the Berachot without the proper concentration. It is written that a Berachah without concentration is like a גוף (body) without a נשמה (soul). In essence, a Beracha recited without proper intent is like a lifeless body! David Hamelech realized that the 100 dead bodies were on account of the 100 "lifeless" Berachot that the Jews were reciting on a daily basis!

David Hamelech turned מה into מאה. The word מה is used to imply "nothingness" (as Moshe Rabeinu said to the Jews "ונחנו מה" - "what are we")

or as the common phrase "מה בכך" is used to imply something of no importance). David Hamelech injected life into these "מה" (empty) Berachot, by reading it "מאה"- he added an א' to "מה". An Aleph is the letter that stands for Hashem. Aleph is one. One is Hashem. In addition, the letter Aleph is made up of a Vav in the center with a Yud above, and a Yud below it. These letters total 26 (26 is the numerical value of the name of Hashem of Havayah). Hashem "built in" the value of this name into the letter that represents him. When we add the א' to מה we add G-dliness and holiness into a "dead" Berachah.

How do we add the א' to מה? By, reciting the Berachot with the proper concentration and intentions. When we do so we add g-dliness and holiness into the Beracha. We should not underestimate the awesome power of pronouncing a Berachah slowly and carefully! It can literally *inject life into lifelessness*, and can actually save people from death ו"ח!!

There is a Pasuk in Shemuel that describes David Hamelech as: "נאום דוד בן ישי ונאם הגבר הקם על" - "the man (king David) who was raised up on high". The word על is numerically 100, and this alludes to the daily 100 Berachot that David Hamelech instituted.

Perek 34 in Tehilim begins: "לדוד בשנותו את טעמו לפני אבימלך ויגרשהו" - "David, when Hashem changed his reasoning before Avimelech and he was chased away and he left". The story behind this Pasuk is that one time David Hamelech had asked Hashem; why did you created the mentally insane?? Hashem answered; "one day you will see why". After David Hamelech killed Goliath he was running from Shaul Hamelech, and he found himself in a Philistine town. When the townspeople realized that it was King David that was amongst them, they informed their king Avimelech that the most wanted Jew was in their midst! When Avimelech came to see David for himself he was shocked to find David acting like a crazy deranged person! Hashem had taken away David's mind, and he was acting insane. Avimelech declared that this could not be King David, and he chased him away. Hashem had saved the life of King David by making him temporarily crazy, thereby showing him a need for the mentally unstable.

In praising Hashem for this miracle David writes in the next Pasuk "אברכה את ה' בכל עת תמיד תהלתו בפי" - "I bless Hashem constantly, his praise is always in my mouth". David Hamelech blesses Hashem *constantly*, even for moments of insanity!

Another understanding of the Pasuk is that David Hamelech was commenting; I was temporarily crazy, but I see that in reality we *all* appear crazy throughout the day! What do we do that makes us appear crazy? It is when we make a blessing with no concentration that we appear like a crazy person mumbling to his food! We just mumble and have no concept of what we are saying, and this is like a crazy man babbling in front of his food!

This is what is alluded to in the Pasuk:

"בשנותו את טעמו לפני אבימלך"- "when David became crazy in front of Avimelech". He laments about another type of insanity.

"אברכה את ה' בכל עת"- "I am blessing Hashem all day long".

However, "תמיד תהלתו בפיו"- "the praise is only *in my mouth*"! They are not said with the focus of the heart!

David Hamelech arose, and insured that we recite the 100 Berachot with the proper concentration.

In the letters מ-א-ה that comprise the word "מאה", there is an allusion to some of the biggest stumbling blocks that we encounter when we try and make a Berachah in a "rushed" manner. Unfortunately when most of us recite a Berachah, we say the words "ברוך אתה ה'", pronouncing the ברוך אתה as a continuous word ("baruchata") without pausing after the word ברוך in order to clearly pronounce the א' of אתה. We instead "swallow" the Aleph by saying Baruchata together.

We also "swallow" the ה' of העולם when we say מלך העולם. Instead of pausing after מלך, we read them together as "melechaolam", when we do so we fail to pronounce the ה' of העולם (we instead say "chaolam" with the "ch" being part of the next word Haolam)

Another letter that we "swallow" is the מ of לחם מן (from the Berachah of Hamosi Lechem Min Haares) if we do not pause after the word לחם, we will read it as "lechemin" as one long word, and lose the מ of מן!

It comes out that the three letters most susceptible not to be pronounced in a blessing are the מ-א-ה, and these letters comprise the word מאה-100. In the word מאה itself we find this allusion that the 100 blessings must be made slowly and clearly, without missing these three commonly skipped letters!

These 100 Berachot that we are instructed to recite with clarity and concentration serves to offset the curses in Parashat Ki Tavoh.

There are 98 curses written in Ki Tavoh, and after the last curse it says גם "חלי-מחלה" (in addition, all of the *sickness* and *illness* that is not written Hashem will bring ח"ו). The 98 curses plus the 2 words חלי-מחלה equal 100. The 100 blessings offset and prevent the 100 curses from befalling us.

The Pasuk in this week's Parasha says "והסיר ה' ממך כל חלי" - "Hashem will remove from you all sickness". The words כל חלי numerically equal 98. These correspond to the 98 curses (without the final two words חלי-מחלה) that are written in Ki Tavoh. How will we be spared from the 98 curses? It is hinted in the preceding word ממך. The word ממך numerically equals 100. It is in the merit of the 100 Berachot (ממך) that we are spared from כל חלי, all the sickness and the curses they represent.

The Tosafot add that if you count the letters in this Pasuk of "ועתה" "מאה מה (to create מאה) they total 99. When we add the א to מה (to create מאה) we add another letter to the Pasuk, and complete the count to make it 100 letters to allude to the 100 Berachot. Tosafot also says that the letters מ-ה themselves hint to the 100 Berachot. The letters מ-ה using the א'ת ב'ש system are י-צ which total 100 (90+10)! (The א'ת ב'ש system is when we take the first letter of the Aleph Beit, the א' - and pair it with the last letter, the ת'. The second letter, the ב', - with the second to last letter, the ש. The third letter, the ג' - with the third to last letter the ר', and so on, throughout the Aleph Beit using this system. The corresponding letter at the other end of the Aleph Beit takes the place of the letter we are dealing with).

Another allusion to the requirement to recite 100 Berachot is found in Tehilim chapter 128. The Pasuk says: "הנה כי כן יברך גבר" "behold, thus shall the man be blessed". The words "כי כן" numerically equal 100, and the next word is "יברך" which can also be understood as "shall bless", showing us that there are 100 Berachot we must make every day.

With this we can understand a deeper understanding behind two words that we say during Shaharit of Shabbat. We say: על כן אברים שפלת: בנו ונשמה שנפחת באפינו ולשון אש שמת בפינו הן הם יודו ויברכו וישבחו (with the limbs and spirit and tongue you gave us, they will praise you

etc.). Why is it necessary to say הן הם - two words that have essentially the same meaning (both meaning "they")? Just say הן or הם??

The deeper meaning behind these words is that they are referring to the Holy letters of Hashem's name of יהוה.

How does הן hint to יהוה? If we analyze the letters יה (which equals 15) we find that the letters יה only have two other 2 letter configurations that equal 15. They are : טו (nine and six) and נח (eight and seven) . There are no other two letters that combine to equal 15. So in total we have 3 times 15 (for the 3- two letter combinations that make 15: (יה/טו/נח) which together equals 45.

The וה (which equals 11) has only four other 2 letter configuration that total 11. They are: דר (seven and four), גח (eight and three), טב (nine and two), and יא (ten and one). In total there are 5 two letter combinations that equal 11 (the 4 mentioned plus the וה itself) these total 55 (5x11=55).

Now we can understand, that since הן is numerically 55 and הם is 45- it is really referring to the יה and the וה. (45 stands for יה and 55 stands for וה). In addition, if we add 55 and 45 it equals 100. The two words "הן הם" stand for the letters of the name of Hashem and together they equal 100. These correspond to the 100 Berachot. We are praising Hashem that with one hundred berachot we are "יודו ויברכו וישבחו" "we thank and **ble**ss". This allusion to the 100 berachot shows us that they are also imbued with 55 and 45 - which signify the name of Hashem!

The 100 Berachot that we make with concentration also shields us from the forces of the Satan. The Satan is known as the מו. The letters -ו מ equal 100, our 100 Berachot counteract the 100 of the מו.

This is hinted in the episode when Yaakov Avinu wrestled with the angel of Eisav. This angel was none other than the מו himself! When the angels realized he could not beat Yaakov, he hit him in the כף ירכו (thigh area). The word כף equals 100. The angel was telling Yaakov; "I may not have beaten you now, but there will come a time that I will slaughter 100 of your descendents every day"! When was this? It was in the time of David Hamelech, when 100 people were dying every day.

When the time came for Yaakov to send the angel back up to heaven he demanded that the angel give him the remedy to stop these 100 deaths. The Pasuk says that Yaakov asked the angel "הגידה נא שמך" ("tell me your name") tell me the secret how to stop the 100 deaths alluded to in your name מ-ס (100)?? The Pasuk writes in the angels response: "ויברך אותו שם" ("he blessed him there"). These words were hinting to Yaakov, that it is the Berachot (ויברך) that when recited properly will put an end to the 100 deaths and stop the forces of the מ-ס!

The Tosafot adds that today, when it proves very difficult for many of us to have the proper focus on all 100 Berachot, there is one part of the prayers that when focused upon, has the power to correspond to all 100 Berachot! This is the Berachah of "Modim" in the Amidah. When we recite the Modim with the proper intent, we are credited as if we recited all 100 Berachot with Kavanah! Indeed, the numerical value of מודים is 100, thus alluding its power!

This fits well with the Gemarah's statement regarding one who does not bow for the Berachah of Modim. The Gemarah says that 7 years after this person dies his spine turns into a snake! The spine that failed to bow and show gratitude to Hashem ends up turning into a snake. The snake of course, represents the Satan that originally seduced Adam and Chava to sin.

When a person does not utilize the beautiful blessing of Modim to thank Hashem, and show gratitude to him, and fails to use the power of Modim - which corresponds to the 100 Berachot that protects us from the מ-ס-, his punishment is that he ends up turning into the creature that symbolizes the מ-ס the snake!

It is written "כל הנשמה תהלל י-ה הללויה" and our sages explain that we must thank Hashem על כל נשימה ונשימה - for every breath! Obviously it is impractical to thank Hashem, and recite Hallel after every breath we take, the Rabbis therefore instituted the blessing of Modim in which we say: "ועל נשמותינו הפקודות לך" which can be understood "our breaths that are with you". The Modim of Shaharit covers us in thanking Hashem for all our breaths from the morning until we pray Minha. The Modim of Minha covers us until Arbit. The Modim of Arbit covers us until Shaharit the next morning. We see from there how all encompassing the Berachah of Modim is in that it thanks Hashem for our entire existence! Showing appreciation to Hashem

is of critical importance. We must appreciate this wonderful Berachah of Modim and take extra care to recite it with the proper feelings of gratitude and thanks to Hashem for all he does for us, and this equals the power of all 100 Berachot!